

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANTO DOMINGO 001562

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER DR

SUBJECT: DOMINICAN PRESIDENT FERNANDEZ STRESSES DANGER OF
INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

Classified By: DCM Lisa Kubiske. Reason: 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (U) Dominican President Leonel Fernandez was host and keynote speaker for a high-level discussion of "The World After Terrorism" on March 14-15. This 12th periodic Plenary Seminar of the Circle of Montevideo, an informal gathering of Latin American former heads of state, was held at Fernandez's Global Foundation for Democracy and Development (FUNGLODE) in Santo Domingo. In his keynote speech Fernandez expressed great concern over the vulnerability of the Dominican Republic to terrorism as the "new paradigm of foreign relations."

¶2. (U) Participants included Nobel Prize winner Oscar Arias of Costa Rica, Julio Maria Sanguinetti of Uruguay, Belisario Betancur of Colombia, and Fernando Henrique Cardoso of Brasil. President of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), Enrique Iglesias, was also present.

¶3. (U) In opening remarks Fernandez said that the issue of security was closely identified with globalization. The Dominican people, also, were victims to the September 11 attacks and their aftermath. Dominicans died both in World Trade Towers and in the March 11 attack on Atocha Station in Madrid in 2004. The abrupt downturn in the Dominican economy in 2002 was due in large part to terrorism's effects on world tourism; Dominicans were part of the "collateral damage" of those attacks.

¶4. (U) Many Dominicans do not understand their vulnerability to terror, Fernandez said. "In our country, traditionally we have lacked the awareness and consciousness of the effects of these international problems on our own national development." Dominicans are focused on immediate national problems such as electricity shortages or the conditions of Dominican prisons. "This lack of historic awareness does not correspond with our reality. . .if we think of ourselves in the historic framework, we see that the world beyond the Dominican Republic has always played a special role for us." He cited the decisive role of the Organization of American States in undermining Trujillo's dictatorship and the United States intervention in 1965.

¶5. (U) Fernandez emphasized the "great significance" of bringing high-level visitors to Santo Domingo for the discussion "so as to raise the people's awareness of the historic truth that no one can remain disengaged from this great struggle, which affects all of mankind and involves the Dominican Republic, as well."

¶6. (U) The March 14 sessions were behind closed doors. The conclusions presented on March 15 were general in nature, focused principally on measures to improve social conditions and to foster economic growth.

¶7. (SBU) The President did the country a service by reminding complacent Dominicans that terrorism is equally capable of striking here. As often happens with these seminars, that clear message was somewhat dissipated in the public rhetoric of the various participants, who tended to pontificate about social themes and complaints of underdevelopment. Nobel Prize winner Oscar Arias went so far as to maintain that the United States had been looking for an enemy since the fall of the Berlin Wall "and on September 11, the United States found one." In a quiet moment later in the day the Ambassador took Arias aside and reminded him that the Al-Qaeda militants had been the ones looking for an enemy on September 11.

COMMENT

¶8. (C) Once again Fernandez delivers the right message on an important topic. He has not yet been as forceful in practice. This happened before, regarding the tractations in late 2004 on the free trade agreement. As for crime, the Dominicans provide rapid, exemplary law enforcement and intelligence cooperation whenever the United States furnishes specific detail about an international threat; but they remain sluggish and timorous about cleaning up the corruption and malfeasance within their own system. The vigor and

principle of Attorney General Dominguez Brito is offset by too much hesitation within the ranks of the uniformed security services about firing those known to be indulgent of corruption or even deeply engaged in it.

19. (U)The full text in Spanish of Fernandez,s remarks is posted on our SIPRNET site,
www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/santodomingo.
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